

Recommendations

The People's Commission has heard from affected residents, workers and businesses that their experience of the convoy protests that laid siege to Ottawa's downtown neighbourhoods was one of occupation, violence and abandonment. In response to that threat — absent protective action and assistance from governments at all levels — the community mobilized to meet their needs and defend their rights. One element of that response is the Ottawa People's Commission.

After reviewing the experience and considering the recommendations of more than 200 people and organizations, OPC concludes the debacle of the convoy occupation can be attributed to the absence of a commitment to human rights, an absence of leadership, an absence of responsiveness to the community and its diverse needs, and an absence of dialogue and community building.

While there are those who suggest the community should "move on" and "get over it", OPC believes it is essential and urgent that the City of Ottawa and other governments provide a substantive — indeed transformative — response, acknowledging the failures, redressing the harms and taking actions that build assurance that the shambolic response to the convoy occupation will never be repeated.

In weighing which recommendations might be most powerful, OPC was mindful of its mandate to focus on the impact of the convoy occupation on the community. But we recognize the occupation constituted an acute crisis on top of ongoing emergencies arising from high levels of homelessness, large numbers of vulnerable residents,

a community struggling to control a pandemic, and an emboldened far-right that advocates white supremacy, hate and intolerance.

Many of these issues require a systemic response.

The majority of recommendations are directed to City Hall, where dramatic, substantive change is urgently needed. Others relate to the Province and federal government, or require the cooperation of all three levels of government.

Some recommendations require immediate action. Others will take more time and more active engagement with residents, community organizations and agencies, and local business leaders to ensure the response meets the community's diverse needs. In each instance, we have recommended a timeframe for follow up action.

OPC received hundreds of suggested recommendations: some specific and granular, others systemic. We have not tried to capture them all here but rather to recommend places or processes where these more detailed or far-reaching recommendations can be vetted and debated.

OPC encourages Ottawa residents, community organizations, elected representatives and others to embrace these recommendations, or advance more effective alternatives, taking up the challenge of advocating for an ambitious human rights agenda, a culture of transformative leadership, a commitment to responsiveness, and a more inclusive and community-building approach to dialogue and democratic action.

After the trauma and disruption of the convoy occupation, Ottawa residents need and deserve fundamental change at City Hall – with cooperation from other levels of government – and a major investment in social infrastructure and community-building to ensure the events of February 2022 are never repeated and be better prepared to deal with all manner of emergency in the future.

EARN TRUST

The City of Ottawa has lost the trust of local residents, having abandoned them during the convoy occupation. Public confidence in the commitment, capacity and competence of the City and local authorities to respect rights and protect health and well-being in a time of crisis has been decimated.

A healthy, diverse and peaceful city relies upon the mutual respect and trust of residents and City officials. To earn residents' trust requires an admission by those officials of the harm they caused through their actions and their failure to act during the occupation, an expression of sincere regret, a recognition of their accountability to the people of Ottawa and to the protection and implementation of human rights, and the adoption of effective measures to redress wrongs and prevent such occurrences in future.

Recommendation 1: Convene town halls

The City of Ottawa should convene town halls in the neighbourhoods in central Ottawa most impacted by the convoy occupation, providing an opportunity for officials to hear firsthand about the concerns and experiences of those who were directly affected, with a view to informing and confirming remedial action and redress.

Recommendation 2: Provide meaningful apologies

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario, and the federal government must all offer meaningful apologies to the people of Ottawa for failing to protect their rights during the convoy occupation. Those apologies should:

1. demonstrate a full understanding of the human rights abuses experienced by residents, workers and business owners;
2. acknowledge that as governments they are accountable to protect people from those human rights abuses and that they failed to meet that obligation; and
3. commit to enacting comprehensive reforms, with broad community input and regular public reporting, to address the causes and consequences of this human rights failure.

Recommendation 3: Redress harms

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should collectively ensure that affected residents, workers and business owners receive full redress for the human rights harms they experienced during the convoy occupation, including:

1. reparations for human rights abuses and violations;
2. compensation for expenses, lost wages and income, business losses and other financial costs incurred as a result of the convoy occupation; and
3. provision of counseling and other health services to address trauma, mental health needs or other health challenges arising from the convoy occupation.

Recommendation 4: Build credibility and collaboration

As a confidence building measure, to demonstrate goodwill and begin to address issues that arose during the convoy occupation, the City of Ottawa should:

1. work with concerned residents, community associations and partners to develop and pilot a transportation plan for Canada Day 2023 that assures reliable, accessible transit and Para Transpo services to residents and businesses within the exclusion zone;

2. work with construction site managers in the red zone to replace horn sounds that alert local residents and workers of imminent blasting with whistles or other sounds that do not trigger residents, workers or pets;
3. work with community associations to support innovative community safety initiatives and strengthen their capacity to provide effective participation and leadership in shaping and implementing Community Safety and Well-Being Plans;
4. work with community partners to develop more robust programs and protocols, with increased funding including surge funding as required, to assure continuous access and service to and for vulnerable persons and households in times of emergency; and
5. work with local businesses and community partners to promote downtown as a vital, vibrant place to live, work, shop and enjoy.

UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Everything about the convoy occupation, including how it was organized, the conduct of participants, and the actions taken by governments and police, represented a wholesale failure to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the city and, in particular, the rights of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people, who have never ceded or surrendered these lands. That disrespect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in Ottawa/Gatineau is longstanding and endemic.

Recommendation 5: Commit to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario should each officially endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work collaboratively with Indigenous leaders and elders, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, to develop implementation plans for the Declaration in the city and for the province.

Recommendation 6: Respect Indigenous leadership in times of crisis

The City of Ottawa, in consultation with Indigenous Peoples' organizations, should develop a policy to ensure that the leadership of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people is acknowledged and respected, and the rights of Indigenous peoples are upheld and protected when the city is faced with emergencies similar to the convoy occupation.

Recommendation 7: Advance reconciliation

Community groups and organizations should invite local First Nations leaders and elders, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations in the Ottawa/Gatineau area, collaboratively to organize healing circles, ceremonies, and other gatherings and events, to acknowledge truth, promote reconciliation, strengthen regard for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and foster greater respect and understanding within and among communities in the region.

PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

The convoy occupation exposed the lack of effective standards and institutional mechanisms at the local level to ensure protection of fundamental human rights for local residents including, but not limited to, the rights to non-discrimination, health care, adequate housing, security of the person, and to a livelihood.

Recommendation 8: Adopt a Human Rights Charter for Ottawa

The City of Ottawa should adopt a Human Rights Charter to better equip residents to hold the City to account for upholding human rights at all times, including during emergencies and crisis situations like the convoy occupation. The Human Rights Charter should:

1. be developed through a robust consultation process with a diverse range of residents and stakeholders, in particular from groups requiring human rights protections;

2. explicitly recognize the vulnerability of particular groups to discrimination, violence, and socio-economic disadvantage, particularly during crises, including Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, racialized individuals, seniors, youth and persons living in homelessness;
3. be grounded in the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and international human rights obligations binding on the City such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
4. apply to all aspects of municipal affairs, including drafting and interpreting bylaws, setting policies and priorities, formulating budgets, and decision-making by all municipal departments and agencies;
5. include a Human Rights Action Plan for the City with resource commitments, benchmarks, timelines and annual public reporting on progress, that is revised and updated annually; and
6. be enforced by an independent municipal human rights commission or other mechanism through which residents can bring complaints of non-compliance with the Human Rights Charter and seek resolution or a remedy.

Recommendation 9: Amend provincial legislation to strengthen human rights protection

The Province of Ontario should amend the Municipal Act to require municipalities to prioritize compliance with their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and amend the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act to require that municipal emergency response plans identify and give priority to the human rights of vulnerable populations.

Recommendation 10: Protect journalists

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should work with media organizations to develop measures that will ensure journalists are safe and media freedom is respected during crises like the convoy occupation. Those measures should focus on the elevated risks faced by female, racialized and Indigenous journalists.

PRIORITIZE SUPPORT FOR DISADVANTAGED AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

During the occupation, the City of Ottawa failed to proactively reach out to vulnerable individuals and households to ensure they were safe and that their fundamental rights such as to food, health care, adequate housing, and to a livelihood were being met. At the same time, life-saving and essential services were suspended and inaccessible to disadvantaged groups, contributing to the violation of their human rights.

Recommendation 11: Develop a city-wide “needs map”

The City of Ottawa, led by Ottawa Public Health and Ottawa Fire Services, should develop a city-wide “needs map” that identifies communities, neighbourhoods and households that might be particularly vulnerable at a time of crisis considering factors such as income, disability, age, race, religion and gender-identity. This map should also include the location and reach of all social and health services relied upon by disadvantaged groups.

Recommendation 12: Develop crisis outreach plans

The City of Ottawa must develop outreach plans to ensure that in times of crisis vulnerable households are reached and their fundamental human rights to, for example, food, adequate housing, transportation, health care, non-discrimination and education, are protected.

Recommendation 13: Ensure access to essential services

The City of Ottawa must develop plans to ensure essential and lifesaving services remain open and accessible at all times, including during times of crisis. This includes public transit, Para Transpo, drop-in centres, food programs, homeless and emergency shelters, and homeless outreach and harm-reduction services. The City of Ottawa must ensure staff and community partners operating these services have the necessary resources and protections needed due to the circumstances of any particular crisis.

KEEP THE COMMUNITY SAFE

Never again can communities in Ottawa be left to endure violence and other harms as they did during the convoy occupation, with inadequate effort by governments and police to keep them safe and uphold their human rights.

Recommendation 14: Develop a policy on protest and community impact

The City of Ottawa must develop a comprehensive policy, backed up by regular training, with respect to the management of protests which includes strong protections for the right to protest as well as for the rights of individuals in communities impacted by protest, with a focus on the human rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community.

Recommendation 15: Strengthen police oversight

The Province of Ontario should launch public consultations towards strengthened police oversight in the city, including reforms to the Ottawa Police Services Board, to improve accessibility, accountability and responsiveness to communities and the public. Regulations should be adopted to ensure timely investigations and responses within 120 days to all complaints about police misconduct.

Recommendation 16: Investigate the failure to protect residents

The City of Ottawa should appoint an independent investigator to examine and report on:

1. allegations that current or former police officers may have provided intelligence, enforcement and other operational information to convoy organizers;
2. the decision of the Ottawa Police Service to refrain from criminal enforcement action against convoy participants prior to invocation of the Emergencies Act;
3. the failure of the Ottawa Police Service to respond to complaints from residents during the occupation; and
4. the decision to refrain from bylaw enforcement during the convoy occupation, including because of security risks faced by bylaw officers and concerns that ticketing might have aggravated the situation.

Recommendation 17: Increase funding for community safety and well-being

The City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario should reduce or reallocate policing budgets so as to provide greater resources to social services, community safety programs, anti-racism and gender equality initiatives, mental health services, income support, provision of housing, harm reduction initiatives, transit services and other programs designed to enhance human rights protection.

STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The City of Ottawa did not manage the emergency caused by the convoy occupation effectively. They failed to communicate basic information to the public, abandoned those needing socio-economic protections and did not ensure they had access to essential services, failed to coordinate a response to the occupation with other orders of government, and did not engage downtown residents and others affected to determine community needs and solutions.

Recommendation 18: Establish an Emergency Advisory Committee

The City of Ottawa should establish an Emergency Advisory Committee, composed of diverse residents in terms of age, ability, indigeneity, gender identity, race and socio-economic status, drawn from all parts of the city. From this Committee, a panel with strong representation from the affected area would be convened when the city, or any part, is faced with a crisis, with a mandate to provide input and advice to City officials and Ottawa Police Service with respect to the situation on the ground and measures they recommend be taken to ensure community safety and human rights protection.

Recommendation 19: Strengthen Ottawa's Emergency Management Program

The City of Ottawa should revise and strengthen its Emergency Management Program, including by:

1. revamping communication protocols for emergency situations to involve community representatives in assessing information needs, so as to ensure that meaningful and detailed information is provided to city residents and businesses through a variety of channels, including community partners, on a timely, frequent basis; and
2. incorporating clear recognition of the obligation to prioritize human rights protection in responding to emergencies through mechanisms

for monitoring human rights abuses, a process for assessing the human rights needs of residents, and detailed measures for preventing, mitigating and responding to human rights abuses.

Recommendation 20: Coordinate emergency response across all orders of government

The City of Ottawa should work with the Province of Ontario and the federal government to establish an office for more effectively coordinating responses to future crises like the convoy occupation, including a centralized and easily accessible emergency contact point for residents and business owners to report human rights abuses and access support.

ADDRESS HATE, BUILD COMMUNITY AND ADVANCE INCLUSION

Many Ottawa residents experienced hate, racism and discrimination at the hands of convoy participants. The impact of racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other hate and discrimination connected to the convoy was inherently violent and has left a devastating impact on residents. Despite the gravity of such hate crimes, it has remained largely unaddressed by officials.

Recommendation 21: Address hate

The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and the federal government should strengthen collaboration to identify individuals and groups promoting hate and violence across Canada and develop and implement a comprehensive, collective plan of action to:

1. prevent its further spread or manifestation, in person and online;
2. develop policies with respect to the display of flags, banners, posters and other materials that are inherently racist or convey messages of hate, discrimination and intolerance;

3. promote proactive efforts to foster diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, including strategies like bystander training and identifying and rewarding leadership that fosters understanding and cooperation; and
4. encourage curriculum development for schools on human rights, civic education and active citizenship.

Recommendation 22: Increase diversity among elected and senior municipal officials

The City of Ottawa should redouble its commitment and improve its performance in boosting gender, racial and all other forms of diversity, to increase equity, inclusion and accessibility within elected and senior levels of municipal government, as well as senior ranks of the Ottawa Police Service.

Recommendation 23: Support community initiatives

The City of Ottawa must increase its support to community safety and well-being by providing more robust financial support to community associations and organizations promoting inclusion, mutual support and solidarity. These organizations and associations should work collaboratively and collectively, through alliances like the Inner-City Working Group, the Federation of Community Associations, the Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas, OttawaCares, and others, to support initiatives to counter hate and division in the city and promote understanding, equity, justice and cooperation, including during times of crisis.

Recommendation 24: Create space for dialogue and community building

Community organizations, aided by foundations and other funding bodies, should consider supporting initiatives like People's Commissions and other similar processes and fora which provide opportunities for constructive dialogue around pressing social issues, with an eye to building understanding, forging solutions and advancing change.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABLE FOLLOW-UP

The experience of the convoy occupation has been traumatic and has shattered the confidence of thousands of Ottawa residents in their governments and police forces. Earning their trust requires a clear demonstration of accountability and transparency, and a commitment to following through on the changes required.

Recommendation 25: Consult publicly and report on implementation

The City of Ottawa, the province of Ontario and the federal government should consult with the public as they prepare plans for implementing recommendations from the Public Order Emergency Commission, the City of Ottawa's Auditor General's reviews and the Ottawa People's Commission, and report publicly every six months on progress on implementation and outcomes.

Timeline For Action

Central to building trust and confidence within the community in the aftermath of the convoy occupation is to demonstrate a meaningful commitment to change. Change comes through action, and action requires a timeline for it to be both feasible and genuine. We offer the following timeline for implementing the recommendations we have proposed. The timeline may evolve, but the target dates should be publicly accessible and regularly updated as required.

By June 30, 2023

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| Recommendation 1: | Convene town halls |
| Recommendation 4: | Build credibility and collaboration |
| Recommendation 25: | Consult publicly and report on implementation |

By September 30, 2023

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| Recommendation 2: | Provide meaningful apologies |
| Recommendation 3: | Redress harms |
| Recommendation 5: | Commit to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples |

By December 31, 2023

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| Recommendation 6: | Uphold Indigenous leadership in times of crisis |
| Recommendation 7: | Advance reconciliation |
| Recommendation 8: | Adopt a Human Rights Charter for Ottawa |
| Recommendation 13: | Ensure access to essential services |
| Recommendation 14: | Develop a policy on protest and community impact |
| Recommendation 15: | Strengthen police oversight |

Recommendation 16:	Investigate the failure to protect residents
Recommendation 17:	Increase funding for community safety and well-being
Recommendation 18:	Establish an Emergency Advisory Committee
Recommendation 19:	Strengthen Ottawa's Emergency Management Program
Recommendation 22:	Increase diversity in elected and senior municipal officials
Recommendation 23:	Support community initiatives

By March 31, 2024

Recommendation 9:	Amend provincial legislation to strengthen human rights protection
Recommendation 10:	Protect journalists
Recommendation 20:	Coordinate emergency response across all orders of government
Recommendation 21:	Address hate

By June 30, 2024

Recommendation 11:	Develop a city-wide "needs map"
Recommendation 12:	Develop crisis outreach plans
Recommendation 24:	Create space for dialogue and community building